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# Crile Denies He 'Made Up' Sequence in CBS Film

By M. A. FARBER

George Crile, the producer of a disputed CBS documentary on the Vietnam War, was accused in court yesterday of fabricating a part of the program that dealt with a supposed "cover-up" of enemy strength statistics after the Tet offensive of January 1968.

After four hours of close questioning about intelligence gathering and computer memories, Dan M. Burt, the lawyer for General William C. Westmoreland, suddenly raised his voice and asked:

"Mr. Crile, you just made up the whole data-base sequence in the broadcast, didn't you?"

"Mr. Burt, that is not true," the witness shot back, his own voice tinged with emotion. "I have explained to you the sources of that sequence."

One of the sources, he underscored, was Comdr. James Meacham, an intelligence officer in Saigon who, according to evidence in the case, often wrote to his wife of the "gargantuan falsehoods" and "mesmerizing lies" involved in his work and of how enemy strength estimates had to "come out the way the general wanted them to."

## Fifth Day of Testimony

Mr. Crile was testifying for the fifth day at General Westmoreland's libel trial against CBS in Federal District Court. The general's \$120 million suit stems from the documentary, "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception," produced by Mr. Crile in 1982.

Yesterday, as Mr. Burt continued his assault on the accuracy and objectivity of the program, he brought out that Mr. Crile had helped to unlock the "mental block" of a key participant in the broadcast, Col. Gains Hawkins, by giving him information before his on-camera interview and had secretly tape recorded telephone conversations with two others, Commander Meacham and Col. Russell Cooley.

In July 1983, Mr. Crile was suspended by CBS for a year for having taped without authorization a number of telephone conversations during the preparation of the Vietnam broadcast, including one with Robert S. McNamara, the former Secretary of Defense. The names of Colonel Cooley and Commander Meacham, who is now the military correspondent of The Economist, the British magazine, did not emerge then.

The network's policy required that the interviewee, or the president of

CBS News, grant permission for such taping.

Mr. Crile testified yesterday that he used the tape recorder simply as a "backup" to his notes or his memory, particularly when he was discussing complicated subjects.

And he denied that he had told Colonel Hawkins, a former military intelligence officer who informed CBS that he had "arbitrarily reduced" enemy strength estimates in 1967, what to say during interviews in 1981.

## 'An Act of Courage'

"I don't think, Mr. Burt, that you tell someone like Colonel Hawkins that you want him to come forward and make acknowledgments that are deeply embarrassing to him," Mr. Crile said. "That is an act of courage on his part and it was an enormous self-sacrifice. It is not in any way involved in being able to suggest to him what he should say. These are very major decisions that people of this caliber make."

Q. Did you offer to help General Westmoreland refresh his memory before you interviewed him, sir?

A. Yes, I did, Mr. Burt. I spoke to General Westmoreland on two occasions and I wrote him a very specific letter and I read that letter out to him on the telephone the week before and I had conversations with him about these subjects, and I will be very happy to go into it in as much length as you would like.

Mr. Burt resumed his questioning about Colonel Hawkins's "mental block" regarding a six-week period before the colonel left Vietnam in September 1967.

But, later, he questioned Mr. Crile about a letter and package of official records that General Westmoreland had sent the producer in June 1981, several weeks after Mike Wallace, the narrator of the Vietnam documentary, had interviewed him.

## The Repeated Assertion

The materials, according to Mr. Burt, concerned the repeated assertion by General Westmoreland during the interview that North Vietnamese infiltration into South Vietnam in the fall of 1967 had been approximately 20,000 a month — much as the documentary would contend, from other sources as well, when it was broadcast in January 1982.

But in 1967, when the general was interviewed on "Meet the Press," he had put the figure at roughly 5,000 to 6,000.

And, with the letter to Mr. Crile — a letter in which he described his session with Mr. Wallace as being "more of an inquisition than a rational interview" — the general included records that showed infiltration to have been at the lower level he portrayed it in 1967.

Now, Mr. Burt suggested that Mr. Crile had deliberately ignored General Westmoreland's materials and "correction."

"On the contrary, Mr. Burt," Mr. Crile said, "there was no statement anywhere in it that he had made a mistake and no request for a correction. There was no alert whatever that he intended to change his repeated statements in the interview. All he said was that there were some documents that he said might be of interest to us."

Mr. Burt introduced a note Mr. Crile sent to Mr. Wallace after receiving the materials, in which the producer said "Westmoreland doesn't bring anything to our attention that is particularly relevant. Certainly nothing that causes concern and requires a new look at anything we have been asserting."

General Westmoreland was commander of American forces in Vietnam from January 1964 to June 1968. In his suit, he contends that CBS defamed him by saying that he had deceived President Lyndon B. Johnson and the Joint Chiefs of Staff about the size and nature of the enemy in the year before the Tet offensive.

The broadcast alleged a "conspiracy" in General Westmoreland's command to minimize the strength of the enemy to make it appear that the United States was winning "a war of attrition." As a result of this "conscious effort," it said, the President and other senior officials in Washington, as well as American forces in Vietnam, were left "totally unprepared" for the widespread attack in January 1968.

One of the five sections of the 90-

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minute documentary also covered what Mr. Wallace and Mr. Crile called an attempt, after the offensive, to "alter" or "tamper with" the "historical record" of enemy strength contained in a computer at military intelligence headquarters in Saigon. Because the estimates of enemy strength had been kept low in 1967, and the casualties at Tet were so high, Mr. Wallace said, General Westmoreland's command was faced with the question: "Whom are we fighting?"

The documentary showed interviews with Commander Meacham and Colonel Cooley, whom Mr. Wallace said — and Mr. Crile reiterated yesterday — had "in effect" accused another intelligence officer, Lt. Col. Daniel Graham, of "personally engineering a cover-up" of the real size of the enemy. Colonel Graham, who later became a lieutenant general and head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, appeared briefly on the broadcast to deny the charge.

Yesterday, Mr. Burt brought out that Colonel Graham's superior, Maj. Gen. Phillip B. Davidson Jr. was present during the discussions in the spring of 1968 about "resetting" enemy strength. The lawyer also tried to show that nothing in the episode was "dishonest."

Mr. Burt played for the jury unused portions of the Meacham and Cooley interviews with Mr. Crile in 1981, in which Commander Meacham denied "faking any intelligence" or knowing of any such efforts and Colonel Cooley indicated that a "question of honesty" was not at issue.

Mr. Crile, who will continue testifying when court resumes on Monday, replied that Colonel Cooley's remarks were being taken out of context. The producer said that Commander Meacham had never "disavowed" what he had written to his wife from Saigon. But, when CBS interviewed him in London 15 years later, Mr. Crile said, the commander got "cold feet."